liberalisation of such movement at the WTO, identifying the barriers faced and suggesting strategies to achieve meaningful liberalisation. Furthermore, requests have also been made to important trading partners in individual service sectors seeking the removal of barriers to access. These aspects are being addressed in the context of the ongoing mandated negotiations for achieving progressive liberalisation of trade in services.

Trade with SAARC countries

†15. SHRI JAYANTILAL BAROT: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) the percentage by which trade between India and SAARC countries has increased during 2000-2001 alongwith the details thereof?

(b) the SAARC country to which Indian export has been the maximum and the goods exported in maximum quantity indicating its value in terms of dollar during the last financial year;

(c) whether Government are considering any action plan for increasing trade with SAARC countries in future; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI SATYABRATA MOOKHERJEE): (a) India's trade with SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) countries registered an increase of 27.76% in 2000-2001 compared to 1999-2000. India's total trade with SAARC countries was US $ 1791.97 million in 1999-2000 and US $ 2289.51 million in 2000-2001.

(b) Of all the countries of SAARC, maximum exports took place to Bangladesh. These were valued at US $ 1094.57 million in 2002-2003. Ten top exports to Bangladesh from India during 2002-2003 are given below:

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

		2002-2003 (Figures in US $ million)	
		Value	Share%
(1)	Cotton Yarn, fabrics, made ups etc.	149.45	13.65
(2)	Rice (other than Basmati)	107.82	9.85
(3)	Wheat	96.19	8.79
(4)	Sugar	63.79	5.83
(5)	Primary & semi-finished Iron & steel	61.57	5.62
(6)	Transport Equipments	55.12	5.04
(7)	Coal	43.82	4.00
(8)	Oil Meals	37.86	3.46
(9)	Machinery & Instruments	37.10	3.39
(10)	Petroleum Products	34.86	3.19

Source: DGCI & S Kolkata (supplied by NIC, DOC)

(c) and (d) Over the recent years, Government have taken several steps to boost India's trade with SAARC countries. The India-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement which came into force from March 2000 is a major step in this direction. Further, India has been exchanging tariff concessions with other SAARC countries under four rounds of SAPTA (SAARC Preferential Trading Arrangement) negotiations. The fourth and the last round was held in October-November 2002 in Kathmandu. Efforts are also being made towards a SAARC Free Trade Area (SAFTA) as a culmination of the SAPTA process. India and Bangladesh have proposed to negotiate a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) from October, 2003.

India has provided a uniqué preferential duty free access to Nepalese goods provided they fulfil certain criteria mutually agreed by both sides in the bilateral Indo-Nepal Trade Treaty last renewed with effect from 6th March, 2002 for a period of five years. A similar preferential trading arrangement exists with Bhutan. Bilateral trade between India and Nepal and India and Bhutan is conducted in Indian currency while it is on the basis of convertible currency with the remaining SAARC countries.

Efforts are also being made to harmonize standards and measurements of export products manufactured in the region to promote and protect intra-regional investments, to avoid double taxation and to harmonize customs procedures and regulations. Trade fairs are organized by the SAARC member countries to show case the trade potential of the member countries. The last SAARC Trade Fair was held in Kathmandu in October, 2002. The next SAARC Trade Fair is scheduled to be held in Dhaka, Bangladesh in December, 2003. Steps are also being taken to improve the infrastructure facilities and the land customs stations on the borders, especially with Bangladesh and Nepal. To facilitate movement of officials handling trade matters and the trading community within the SAARC region, the SAARC VISA Exemption Schemes has been in operation. The Scheme incorporates an agreed list of entitled persons who are issued the SAARC VISA in their respective countries of citizenship.

Protection for traditional Indian medicines

16. SHRI C. RAMACHANDRAIAH: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state the action taken to strengthen the work already initiated in the TRIPS (Trade Related Intellectual Property) to save traditional Indian medicines in the global consumers market in view of the extensive public health and safety risks posed by the counterfeit medicines?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI SATYABRATA MOOKHERJEE): The TRIPS Agreement lays down minimum standards of protection of intellectual property rights which WTO Member countries are obliged to implement in their law. The TRIPS Agreement does not deal with the issue of counterfeit medicines from the public health and the safety risk perspective.

India along with a number of bio-diversity rich developing countries has made a proposal in the WTO for prevention of bio-piracy and to ensure a mutually supportive relationship between the TRIPS Agreement and the Convention on Biological Diversity. India has proposed that "the TRIPS Agreement should be amended in order to provide that Members shall require that an applicant for a patent relating to biological materials